



# Washington State Department of Agriculture News Release

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## **Still time for horse owners to vaccinate against West Nile virus**

**OLYMPIA** — Although it is mid-summer, there is still time for horse owners to vaccinate against West Nile virus (WNV).

This has been an unusually busy summer for biting insects and it is important that horse owners still take precautions against WNV, which is spread by infected mosquitoes, said Dr. Dick Vetter, acting state veterinarian for the Washington State Department of Agriculture.

A bite by an infected mosquito can result in infection of horses, humans and many species of birds. Last year, Washington and Oregon were the only states in the country that did not report any positive cases of WNV — acquired within their boundaries — in any species.

To date, there have been no reports of infection in Washington. However, other western states, including Idaho, Nevada and California, have already had several equine cases of the disease, as well as cases of human infection.

Still, horse owners should consider vaccination, and there are now two commercially available WNV vaccines for horses. These vaccines work in different ways, so they do not complement each other. Horse owners should contact their private veterinarian for more information on the vaccines and their differences.

“Horse owners still need to take precautions,” said Dr. Vetter, “If horses are being vaccinated for the first time, they need a series of two shots, three to six weeks apart. If the horse was previously vaccinated with the series, it needs an annual booster before the beginning of the mosquito season. Horse owners should contact their private veterinarians for vaccination and other health information.”

The best way to minimize the threat of WNV is to control mosquitoes and prevent horses from being exposed to adult mosquitoes. Some protective measures include changing the water in livestock troughs, fountains, birdbaths and wading pools weekly during mosquito season. Owners may also consider draining or treating stagnant water, mowing grass and weeds, putting up screens to protect homes and stables from mosquitoes, and putting horses in stables at night. Repellents and insecticides should be used only according to label directions.

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Veterinarians and horse owners should alert the state veterinarian's office if they observe unusual signs of illness in any equine, including horses, mules, ponies and donkeys. Signs of West Nile virus in these animals can include loss of appetite, listlessness, stumbling, lack of coordination, weakness of limbs, partial paralysis and death. While many exposed equines show no signs of illness, WNV is documented to be fatal in about 30 percent of cases.

More WNV information is available on the following Web sites:

Department of Agriculture, <http://agr.wa.gov/FoodAnimal/default.htm>

Department of Health, <http://www.doh.wa.gov/EHP/TS/ZOO/WNV/WNV.HTML>

U.S. Department of Agriculture, <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/lpa/issues/wnv/wnv.html>

Washington State University, <http://www.wnv.wsu.edu>

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